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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000711

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SUBJECT: CROWN PRINCE AND PDAS CHENEY DISCUSS FORUM FOR THE FUTURE, REFORM, TERRORISM, AND FTA

REF: MANAMA 692

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary

11. (C) NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney reviewed plans for the November Forum for the Future with Crown Prince Salman in a May 10 meeting and praised the role that Bahrain is playing as host. She emphasized U.S. support for Bahrain's reform program and stressed that the GOB must continue to move forward in this regard. The CP agreed and affirmed that the GOB was actively engaged in promoting reform. He said that he was not worried about Islamists taking power in the region, as checks and balances would mitigate potentially negative developments. On the draft counterterrorism law currently before the Bahraini parliament, the CP said that the GOB should lobby parliamentarians more but was confident the law would pass. The CP's Chief of Staff indicated that the Bahraini parliament would try to ratify the FTA before its summer break begins June 15. The CP noted that the GOB was very pleased by Qatar's recent agreement to provide natural gas to Bahrain. End Summary.

Forum for the Future

12. (C) Visiting NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney, accompanied by NEA DAS Scott Carpenter and the Ambassador, met with Crown Prince Salman May 10 and reviewed plans for the November Forum for the Future. Cheney praised the role that Bahrain is playing as host of the forum and said that the steering committee meeting held that morning (septel) demonstrated that the GOB is ready to move forward with preparations. Carpenter commented on the involvement of civil society in the planning process, noting that there is always some tension between civil society and governments but if expectations are managed well the result will be positive. The CP agreed that civil society should play a prominent role in the Forum.

Human Rights and Democratic Reform

13. (C) Cheney emphasized U.S. support for Bahrain's reform program and stressed that the GOB must continue its progress in this area. She mentioned last year's closure of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) as cause for concern. The CP said that the BCHR was perceived as partisan and that the majority of its board members were from leading Shi'a opposition political society Al Wifaq. He added that the GOB wants to create a human rights center to collect reports and address human rights issues.

14. (C) When asked about the potential impact of Islamists taking power in the region by democratic means, the CP replied that there are ways to balance the effects of such a development. In Bahrain the King and the appointed Shura Council play this balancing role, and other countries have different solutions. He noted that the Al Asala (Salafi) bloc in parliament says it is not interested in democracy and that it participated in the elections only so that less religious people would not take the seats. (Note: Al Asala is now one of the leading political forces in parliament, focusing on moral and ethical issues and adherence to Islamic values. End Note.) On Al Wifaq, the CP predicted that if it enters parliament, it will break into several groups as its members represent a wide variety of perspectives.

Counterterrorism Law

15. (C) Cheney highlighted the need for a counterterrorism law and for continued monitoring of terrorist suspects in Bahrain. She noted that the Minister of Interior had told her earlier that day that he was meeting with MPs to encourage support for the draft counterterrorism law that was

recently presented to parliament. The CP said that although he had full confidence in the Minister of Interior, he did not believe that the GOB was lobbying parliamentarians enough on the draft counterterrorism law. He reported that the Al Asala bloc is not on board, but nevertheless believed that parliament would support the draft.

FTA Ratification

16. (C) The CP's Chief of Staff Mohammed bin Isa Al Khalifa commented that the Bahraini parliament will try to ratify the FTA before its three-month summer break begins June 15. He noted that the break will be delayed if the budget is not passed. The CP said he hoped that the U.S. Congress would also rapidly ratify the FTA.

Bahrain-Qatar gas line

17. (C) The Ambassador asked the CP about press reports stating that Qatar has agreed to supply Bahrain with natural gas via pipeline (reftel). The CP confirmed the report, but said the contract to construct the pipeline had not been signed yet. He expected the pipeline would become operational within 2-3 years and said that it would be up to the Qataris to decide which company would manage the project.

18. (U) PDAS Cheney cleared this cable.
MONROE